

## **Art for art's sake**

Children get cultural enrichment – thanks to smokers

Story and photos by **SARAH RUBY**

Pinnacle Staff Writer

Maria Juana Contreras would have stayed home last Saturday if it weren't for the free busses, courtesy of cigarette smokers, that took her and her children to Arte ala Carte, a day of art, food and music at the Morgan Hill Community and Cultural Center.

"The migrant program told us about the transportation," said the Spanish-speaking Contreras. "It gives me a chance to take out my kids."

Contreras, here seasonally for agricultural work, spoke as lilting Peruvian tunes wafted through the outdoor amphitheatre, where children and parents created art at 18 hands-on art workshops. More than 1,200 people came three times as many as last year, including 70, like Contreras, bused from Gilroy and San Martin.



David and Annie Wang of Morgan Hill watch their 18-month-old baby Clarissa create a work of art on a canvas at last Saturday's Art ala Carte at the Community and Cultural Center. The event was free and open to children Clarissa's age for the first time thanks to FIRST 5, a county group that uses tobacco taxes to serve children from zero to five years

With the help of 130 volunteers, children made magical wands, painted canvases, painted multi-cultural wind chimes using Asian, Aztec and Celtic designs, made Moroccan good luck hand symbols, beaded bracelets, masks, ceramic guardian angels, and even sent notes to troops stationed abroad.

The enrichment day for children is in its fourth year in Morgan Hill, but this year it was free courtesy of FIRST 5, a county commission that uses tobacco tax dollars to serve children from the womb to age 5. FIRST 5 is funded by Proposition 10, which added 50-cents to the price of

tobacco products to pay for early childhood development programs.

"I had no idea it was going to be so good," said Andrea Kennedy from Gilroy, who came with three kids. "It was perfectly pitched for children. To hear it is being paid for by tobacco tax, my husband was just applauding. To use the profit in such a positive way to give back to the future- I was blown away.

For many, it was their first trip to Morgan Hill's new downtown showpiece, a building designed for just this sort of community cultural enrichment.

"I'm glad they chose the community center, it's really beautiful," said 9 year old Andrew Boyd from Morgan Hill, who came to the event with his mother, sister and grandmother. "I could go on and on with these art projects!"

His favorite project was the wind chime.

"I think it's terrific," said his grandmother Florence Boyce.

FIRST 5 arranged for transportation to and from the event and subsidized the \$2 donation the city usually charges to pay for art supplies. Because of its mission to attend to children under 5, the group brought in five art projects geared to young children, opening the event to a younger age group. Free food and three free magic shows meant that anyone could come and enjoy the day.

“Everything we do has to be accessible to everyone,” said FIRST 5 deputy director Jolene Smith. “We know that transportation’s an issue,” she said as well as including aspects of other cultures.

Perhaps the biggest indicator that Saturday’s Art ala Carte was measured in hot dog consumption.

“When the hot dog man told me he ran out of 800 hot dogs in an hour and a half, I thought ‘Oh my goodness!’” said Therese Luger, recreation supervisor for the City of Morgan Hill.

In the past years, when money was plentiful, the event had 50 sponsors. This year they only had 15, including the City of Morgan Hill, the Police Department and the Rotary Club.

FIRST 5 has collected just under \$3 million in three years to use for arts enrichment for children throughout Santa Clara County.



Veronica Corona, age 9 from Morgan Hill, paints an angel in the ceramic room of the new Community and Cultural Center at last Saturday’s Art ala Carte. She came with her mother Estella and brother Humberto, age 5, and her friend Jose Perez (background middle) age 7 from San Martin.

“Exploration and the arts, and the decision-making and thought processes that go with it, are so vital to a child’s early development,” said Smith.

This was the first event to take up the entire campus of Morgan Hill’s Community Center since it opened in December, utilizing the outdoor amphitheatre, the community playhouse, the children’s pavilion, and each room inside the center.

The city combined the Police Department’s annual Safety Faire with their event, and officers

did safety demonstrations throughout the day. Dr. Eric Cohen gave horse drawn wagon rides until 4p.m., an hour after the event had finished. There were three free magic shows in the Playhouse and each show played to a full house.

“I applaud Morgan Hill,” Said Andrea Kennedy. “It shows you what a family-oriented town Morgan Hill is.